



# **VISTA HOST SITE INFORMATION**

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## **A. ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION**

The Wisconsin DPI Family-School-Community Partnerships AmeriCorps\*VISTA Project began in 1998 and is funded by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant allows for 20 VISTA members to serve as family-school-community partnership coordinators in low-income Wisconsin schools and community organizations. The project goals for the sites are to:

- Develop and expand ongoing collaborative partnerships between the sites and their respective families and communities;
- Involve parents of students in learning at home, volunteering, communicating with teachers and administrators, and participating in site decision making and community collaboration,
- Create and train an Action Team for Partnerships to design, implement, and sustain partnership practices for the purpose of improving student achievement.

The project design is based on the research of Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University.

### **DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION & COMMUNITY LEARNING AND PARTNERSHIPS TEAM (DPI – CLP)**

The Community Learning and Partnerships Team of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction administers this grant, which provides for AmeriCorps\*VISTAs to work in schools and other community sites serving a high proportion of low-income students and families. Under the leadership of the elected state superintendent, the DPI advances the cause of public education and public libraries and provides technical assistance to the public schools so that all school age children have access to quality educational programs that meet high standards of excellence and all citizens have access to comprehensive public library resources and services.

The mission of the CLP Team is to work with communities to ensure learner success and stronger communities through family - school - community partnerships. The CLP Team brings together staff and programs that focus on helping to build strong communities. The core team includes staff in community education, early childhood education, nutrition education, service-learning, and family-school-community partnerships. The team works with other teams and programs in the agency to promote the work of the VISTA grant, including reading, Title I, Family Literacy/Even Start, student services, SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education), school and public libraries, and special needs. The resources of the DPI are available to the VISTA sites.

The CLP team is part of the Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning (DLTCL) at the DPI. Find the CLP team website at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/index.html>. The Project Coordinator and VISTA Leader are located here to help you with technical assistance with your site responsibilities and work plan related concerns, payroll questions, conference registration, and reimbursement for on-site training related expenses.

## **VOLUNTEERS IN SERVICE TO AMERICA (VISTA)**

AmeriCorps\*VISTA is a national service program in which full time volunteers build infrastructure and design sustainable programs while living in the communities they serve. Started in 1965, VISTA was created to meet the needs of underserved communities and to address and combat poverty. VISTA is now a program under the umbrella of AmeriCorps, a national service initiative started in 1993. The Corporation for National and Community Service ([www.cns.gov](http://www.cns.gov)), also created in 1993, oversees all AmeriCorps\*VISTA programs.

## **CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (CNCS)**

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Members and volunteers serve with national and community nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and local agencies to help meet community needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security, and other critical areas.

## **NATIONAL NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS (NNPS)**

Established by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, The National Network of Partnership Schools brings together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships. "Based on more than a decade of research and the work of many educators, parents, students, and others, we know that it is possible for all elementary, middle, and high schools to develop and maintain strong programs of partnership," explains Joyce L. Epstein, Director, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Dr. Epstein and all of the staff will work with members of the Network to encourage, inform, recognize, and support efforts to improve and maintain school, family, and community connections that produce positive results for students. The Center and NNPS are located at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Visit <http://www.partnershipschools.org> for more information on NNPS, conferences, promising partnership practices, a bulletin board, meeting NCLB requirements, and current research. **All sites interested in hosting a VISTA member MUST join NNPS.** The one time fee is waived if members fill out and submit yearly update forms.

## **B. AMERICORPS\*VISTA POSITION DESCRIPTION**

The overall goal of the DPI AmeriCorps\*VISTA Project is to build capacity for family involvement in low-income schools and communities by implementing a research-based, sustainable process for partnerships.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

Each individual project site should adapt the position description and work plan to the needs of the site and local community (these modifications need to be approved by the Project Coordinator). For example, DPI VISTAs may be expected to:

- Participate in an assets mapping project in collaboration with staff and community members.
- Help develop staff development and parent education workshops.
- Enhance relationships with staff, volunteers, parents, and others that will help sustain programs beyond the VISTA's term of service.
- Help establish an effective and comprehensive communication system for the site community.
- Help families understand organization structure and to feel welcome at the site.
- Coordinate the recruitment and training of tutors and/or mentors.
- Communicate regularly with volunteers to discuss their work and address any concerns.
- Help in offering learning activities and events for the whole family.

- Include parents and other community members in facilitating children's learning outside of school or organization.
- Recruit families and other community members to volunteer in community events.
- Encourage parents to participate in school or organization activities, including attending school board and site council meetings.
- Involve local service groups at the site.
- Recognize and celebrate community involvement in schools.
- Promote partnership efforts through various media, such as local newspapers, radio stations, or community bulletin boards.
- Write grant proposals to support partnership activities.

## **QUALIFICATIONS**

VISTA candidates must have

- A bachelor's degree.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills.
- Computer and e-mail proficiency.
- Excellent organizational skills.
- Patience and flexibility.
- Entrepreneurial skills (to seek funding).
- Relationship-building skills.
- Team and leadership skills.
- Research skills.
- A willingness to take initiative to promote partnerships.
- Commitment to the mission of the project and its impact on schools and communities.

The VISTA reports directly to his or her Site Supervisor but will also be responsible for communicating regularly with the VISTA Project Coordinator and VISTA Leader through bi-weekly and quarterly reporting and other progress assessments. Additionally, VISTAs are encouraged to network and share resources with fellow DPI VISTA members through e-mail, occasional regional and statewide meetings, and by phone.

## **BENEFITS**

To support them in their service, AmeriCorps\*VISTAs receive:

- A living allowance of \$891/month (urban) or \$858 (rural).
- Health coverage.
- Child care, if eligible (\$400/month).
- Option of an end-of-year cash stipend of \$1,200 or an Education Award of \$5,350.
- Ten personal leave days and ten sick days.
- An option to purchase life insurance.
- A relocation allowance (if moving more than 50 miles).
- Training opportunities
- Loan deferment and forbearance options

## C. STAKEHOLDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

*The following information outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the Wisconsin DPI Family-School-Community Partnerships AmeriCorps\*VISTA Project.*

### DPI – CLP TEAM

- The DPI allocates a monthly living allowance of \$891 or \$858/month. Checks are deposited directly into the VISTAs' bank accounts bi-weekly. This money comes from the project's CNCS grant.
- The DPI screens all candidates and coordinates enrollment procedures for selected VISTA candidates by forwarding all enrollment paperwork to the CNCS.
- The DPI helps the site in recruiting candidates for available positions through the online AmeriCorps recruitment system and other venues.
- The DPI provides an orientation at the beginning of the year and various training opportunities throughout the year for VISTAs and their Site Supervisors.
- The DPI provides networking opportunities to members via e-mail, regional meetings, and various trainings.
- The DPI conducts regional and individual site visits.
- The DPI coordinates monthly communication with Site Supervisors.
- The DPI acts as a liaison between sites and the CNCS to provide information to all VISTAs and Supervisors.
- When VISTAs elect the end-of-year cash stipend of \$1,200, the DPI provides the stipends through the grant from CNCS.
- The DPI provides information on grant opportunities, workshops, and other topics.
- The Project Coordinator and VISTA Leader provide technical support and guidance.
- The DPI develops a memorandum of understanding between all stakeholders.

### SITES

- Site Supervisors must attend the DPI Orientation for VISTAs and supervisors at the beginning of the VISTA year, as well as certain required trainings with their VISTA during the year (see application for details). All costs incurred by Supervisors will be covered by the DPI.
- Site Supervisors are strongly encouraged to attend national VISTA Supervisor Training (before the VISTA's term of service begins). Costs incurred are covered by CNCS (see application for more details).
- Site Supervisors must design an On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) to acquaint their VISTA with the staff, community, and position. Obtaining "buy-in" for the VISTA position prior to applying is necessary for the success of the program.
- Host sites must provide office space with access to a phone, voicemail, printer, fax machine, computer, and the internet.
- Host sites have the option of contributing a set amount to the DPI for reimbursing the indicated expenses. Upon request of need from the site, the DPI will provide financial assistance within its budget capacity.
- Site Supervisors have the option to modify the Work Plan for their VISTA *prior* to his/her arrival with approval from the DPI and are required to ensure that it is followed throughout the year.
- Supervisors must be available to meet with their VISTA to discuss projects, goals, and actions, and communicate with the DPI on a bi-weekly basis.
- Host sites must not expect or ask VISTAs to perform direct service activities at their site (i.e. work that is normally done by a paid staff member, such as substitute teaching, answering phones, lunch/recess/bus duty, etc.; or by a volunteer, such as copying, filing, data entry, etc.).
- New host sites must complete a Host Site Application when applying for a VISTA member; returning school host sites must complete a Continuing Host Site Application for each year they apply for a VISTA.

**NOTE:** *It is strongly encouraged that host sites provide additional benefits, such as school lunches, bus pass/travel reimbursement or utility assistance; however, sites may not supplement or increase the living allowance provided by the DPI CLP or provide any other monetary compensation (per federal law).*

## D. RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT TIMELINE

The DPI and the school site work together to recruit and approve VISTA members. Once a candidate is selected, the site will complete the enrollment paperwork with the candidate and return it to the DPI before the deadline. The AmeriCorps\*VISTA members' term of service is for one calendar year, and begins immediately following the mandatory Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) required by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which will take place in Indianapolis. The DPI VISTA Project can send 3 VISTAs to the July PSO (start date of July 19) and 17 to the August PSO (start date of August 23). ***We will accommodate the preference of the site to the best of our ability.***

**March 1:** New Host Site Webinar

**March 15:** Applications due

**March 22:** Accepted host sites notified

**Feb-June:** Recruitment of VISTA member

**May 28:** Recruitment deadline ONE

**July 13-16:** VISTA member Pre Service Orientation (Indianapolis)\*

**July 1:** Recruitment deadline TWO

**August 17-20:** VISTA member Pre Service Orientation (Indianapolis)\*\*

**August 23:** VISTAs begin service at site

\*3 VISTAs statewide

\*\*17 VISTAs statewide